

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3455

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 5952

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: TS, XF

SUBJECT: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TUNISIA, OCT 16

REF: TUNIS 5941 AND PREVIOUS

1. SECURITY SITUATION IN TUNIS UNCHANGED.

2. LOCAL NEWS MEDIA HAVE REACTED IN PREDICTABLY NEGATIVE FASHION TO NEWS OF U.S. ARMS SHIPMENTS TO ISRAEL. TREATMENT, HOWEVER, IS RELATIVELY RESTRAINED. ALTHOUGH EDITORIALS GENERALLY CRITICAL, BOURGUIBA LETTER TO PRESIDENT NIXON FEATURED PROMINENTLY AND SETS GENERAL TONE OF RISING CONCERN--MORE IN SORROW THAN ANGER. EDITORIAL IN DESTOUR PARTY ORGAN AL-AMAL, FOR EXAMPLE, WONDERED HOW PROVIDING ISRAEL WITH WEAPONS "TO HELP HER CONTINUE KILLING INNOCENT CIVILIANS" COULD ACHIEVE THE STABLE, DURABLE PEACE FOR WHICH THE U.S. SAYS IT IS WORKING. AS-SABAH IS CRITICAL OF WHAT IT CHARACTERIZES AS
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PRESIDENT NIXON'S PREFERENCE FOR ESCALATION OF WAR OVER

IMPLEMENTATION OF VARIOUS UN RESOLUTIONS TO BRING ABOUT A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT IN MIDDLE EAST. PAPER CONTINUED THAT ISRAEL IS ONLY STATE IN REGION WHICH IS FIGHTING IN TERRITORY NOT ITS OWN WHILE ARAB COUNTRIES ARE DEFENDING THEIR RIGHT TO PRESERVE THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY. IN LIGHT OF THESE FACTS, EDITORIALIST WAS SURPRISED THAT PRESIDENT NIXON SPOKE IN SUPPORT OF THE INTEGRITY OF THE STATES IN THE AREA. SAME WRITER NOTED THAT IN RECENT PAST USG HAS DECLARED THAT IT WILL NOT EXERT ANY PRESSURE ON ISRAEL AND THAT IT CANNOT IMPOSE A SOLUTION.

3. MORE MODERATE LANGUAGE WAS USED IN EDITORIAL OF L'ACTION ENTITLED "APPEAL TO REASON", WHICH EXPATIATED AT LENGTH ON NEED FOR AMERICA TO SAVE ITS IMAGE AND INTERESTS IN AREA BY WORKING RAPIDLY FOR A SOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO ALL IN AREA. SHARPEST ATTACK, HOWEVER, WAS MADE ON VICE PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE FORD IN LA PRESSE FOR HIS ALLEGED REMARKS THAT U.S. WILL SUPPORT ISRAEL "TO THE END" WITH REGARD TO ARMS SUPPLY AND WAR MATERIAL. FORD IS ALSO QUOTED AS SAYING THAT HE HOPES "A MILITARY SOLUTION WILL TAKE PLACE QUICKLY IN ORDER TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION". EDITORIALIST INTERPRETS THIS LANGUAGE AS AN AMERICAN DESIRE FOR AN ISRAELI VICTORY AND WONDERS IF THIS ANTI-ARAB POSITION REALLY EXPRESSES OFFICIAL POSITION OF USG.

4. PRESS ALSO NOTES PRESIDENT NIXON'S COMMENTS TO MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS IN WHICH ALLUSIONS WERE MADE TO U.S. ACTIONS IN LEBANON IN 1958 AND JORDAN IN 1970. CITING UNNAMED COMMENTATORS, PRESS WONDERS IF USG MIGHT NOT BE SERVING A "WARNING" TO USSR AND ARABS WITH REGARD TO ISRAEL'S INTEGRITY.

5. LOCAL MEDIA HAVE ALL CARRIED NEWS OF U.S. ARMS DELIVERIES TO ISRAEL IN STRAIGHTFORWARD FACTUAL FASHION, NOTING INTER ALIA USG RATIONALE THAT AMERICAN ACTION TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO MASSIVE USSR ASSISTANCE TO ARABS. L'ACTION HEADLINE, HOWEVER, REPORTED "AERIAL BRIDGE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND TEL AVIV" WITHOUT PROVIDING ANY DETAILS.

6. COMMENT: IT STILL TOO EARLY TO GAUGE GENERAL PUBLIC REACTION TO NEWS OF AMERICAN RESUPPLY EFFORTS. INITIAL EMBASSY CONTACTS REFLECT SIMILAR SORROW AND CONCERNED MOOD NOTED ABOVE IN CONNECTION WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S LETTER TO PRESIDENT
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